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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001340

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GENEVA FOR RMA

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KN](#) [TH](#) [DPRK](#)

SUBJECT: THAI RESPONSE ON NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES

REF: STATE 33786

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR BOYCE, REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

11. (C) Summary. During March 3 conversations, Thai FM Kantathi and NSC Chief Winai said that the North Korean refugee issue was sensitive for Thailand. However, they indicated that the RTG was willing to work with the USG on discreet, case-by-case processing of North Korean refugees for U.S. resettlement. This represents a welcome shift of the Thai position, but one that needs to be treated with some caution given the uncertain political future of the Thaksin government. End summary.

12. (C) Per reftel, Ambassador met March 3 with Foreign Minister Kantathi on North Korean refugees. Ambassador also took the opportunity to raise the issue of the missing Hmong minors (septel). Prior to the meeting, and per reftel, Refcoord contacted ROK Embassy Counselor Hong-Kyun Kim and stated that the Embassy had received instructions to approach the RTG on North Korean refugees and hoped the ROK Embassy would inform the RTG, if approached, that it had no objections to the planned U.S. strategy on this issue.

13. (C) Ambassador told Kantathi that the North Korea Human Rights Act requires the USG to facilitate the resettlement of qualified North Korean refugees to the United States. The United States recognized that this issue was sensitive for Thailand and appreciated that the Thai had done a good job of quietly facilitating the movement of North Koreans to South Korea. The United States did not want to do anything that might negatively affect the current situation. At the same time, the United States thought there might be cases for which U.S. resettlement would be appropriate. The United States did not know of any such cases now, but if one arose would cooperate with UNHCR and the ROK in determining bona fides and carrying out the other usual steps of U.S. refugee processing. If the United States found that a refugee was ineligible for U.S. resettlement, the ROK had said that it would nevertheless accept the person. The Ambassador urged the Foreign Minister to permit U.S. processing of North Korean refugees and allow them to depart for the United States if found eligible.

14. (C) Kantathi responded that Thailand permits South Korea to process and resettle North Koreans quietly. The Thai had also worked successfully with the ROK when some North Koreans had entered the Thai Embassy in Hanoi. He said that he had heard that North Korean refugees had found it hard to integrate into South Korea. It seemed the United States was now prepared to give the "green light." Kantathi asked if the United States was most interested in getting access. The Ambassador replied that we wanted to process North Korean refugees for resettlement to the United States and briefly described the steps of the process. The Ambassador again urged Kantathi to allow the U.S. to move ahead with this initiative.

15. (C) Kantathi said this issue was sensitive for Thailand. He noted that the North Koreans had targetted Embassies in Beijing but the Chinese had been successful in cutting off that option by strengthening security in the diplomatic quarter. Now the North Koreans followed a route that took them through Yunnan Province and down the Mekong River. Thailand had heard that there were 30,000-40,000 North Koreans around the region outside of their country. The Thai government was worried about a pull factor and did not want to encourage the North Koreans to come to Thailand. It would be best if North Koreans could be processed for resettlement with UNHCR assistance in China. Kantathi also stated that Thailand's relations with North Korea were sensitive. He cited the issue of the Thai woman who had apparently been abducted many years ago by the North Koreans and whose case came to light after Robert Jenkins left North Korea. The Thai government had raised her case, unsuccessfully so far, with the DPRK. It would continue to pursue the issue, however, and might work with the Japanese and Chinese to achieve a satisfactory result. The North Korean government was very difficult, Kantathi said.

16. (C) Kantathi then said that, personally speaking, the RTG could work with the USG on the U.S. resettlement of North

Koreans on a discreet, case-by-case basis. He emphasized that the process must be discreet. He also requested that the USG explore the possibility of resettlement processing with the PRC. The Ambassador thanked Kantathi for this response.

17. (C) Following the discussion with Kantathi, the Ambassador telephoned General Winai Phattiyakul, the head of the Thai National Security Council. The Ambassador made similar points to Winai about U.S. intentions and strong desire to process North Korean refugees for U.S. resettlement. The Ambassador relayed the response of FM Kantathi and asked if Winai had the same position. Winai responded that the normal Thai practice was to send North Korean refugees to South Korea. Then moving off the stance he had previously taken, Winai responded that if the USG was willing and able to process North Korean refugees, it would probably be possible to work something out.

18. (C) Comment. This is a welcome response from the Thai government and a shift of the previous Thai position. The current uncertain political situation and the possibility that Thaksin may not remain in power means that the Thai response should be taken with some caution. End comment.

BOYCE